

Mel Ramos: *Wonder Woman*

Following the Mel Ramos retrospective that traveled across seven major European museums in 2010-2011 to celebrate Ramos's 75th birthday and on the occasion of Batman's 75th birthday this year, it seems only fitting that Magnolia Editions revisit the iconic superhero paintings that would catalyze his emergence as one of Pop Art's most recognizable figures.

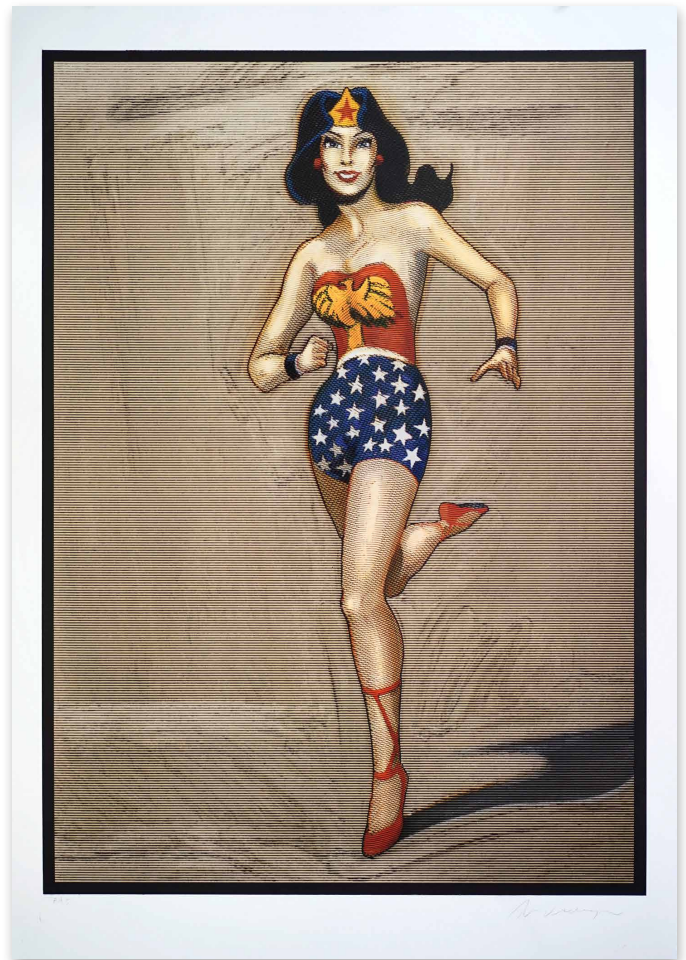
In 1960 I was wallowing in despair when I gave up painting abstract expressionism and painted something that I used to love as a kid, American super heroes, and I did a painting of Superman. My life changed, Pop Art was born and I was caught up in the energy of it all.

—MEL RAMOS

As curator Louis K. Meisel writes, "In mid-1961, at the beginning of what would be called 'Pop Art,' Mel Ramos produced what we would consider his first true mature image. That very well-known painting is *Superman*, and it displays a style and technique which Ramos has been identified with ever since. *Superman* [...] was the first true Pop painting that the artist produced. Followed by *Batman*, these paintings were straight out of the comic books, and in every way related to the commercial images of Andy Warhol, the cartoons of Roy Lichtenstein, and the word paintings of Ed Ruscha, not to mention the few others all hitting stride in 1961 and 1962."

Today, Ramos has the benefit of decades of printmaking experience and a corresponding knack for getting the most out of his collaborators. The artist worked closely with Magnolia director Donald Farnsworth and Bay Area realist painter and frequent Magnolia collaborator Guy Diehl to develop the wood block matrices and the corresponding layers of acrylic color.

Over the course of several months, Farnsworth and Diehl worked with Ramos to digitally translate his compositions into raster files, creating a digital template for a computer-guided laser to carve the basic matrix from a block of wood. Diehl, whose photorealist still life paintings demand an extraordinarily still hand, performed much of the subsequent hand carving.



Mel Ramos - *Wonder Woman*, 2014. Woodcut with acrylic. 37 x 26.75 in. Edition of 30

The artist selected and proofed new colors for these editions, which were printed by master printer Tallulah Terryll in UV-cured acrylic ink over a woodcut impression in black relief ink printed by master printer Nicholas Price.

Besides signaling the beginning of Pop Art, Ramos's early superhero paintings — especially *Wonder Woman* — marked an important transition in the artist's subject matter. Once the de Kooning-inspired abstractions of his art school days gave way to the unambiguous figuration of the forementioned caped crusaders, it was only a matter of time before Ramos began painting superheroines. The advent of 1962's *Phantom Lady* and *Wonder Woman* ultimately led to the colorful female nudes for which he is best known. As such, Ramos's 2014 editions with Magnolia find the artist celebrating how far he has come by using 21st-century printmaking innovations to revisit the paintings that started it all.

—NICK STONE